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REVIEWS.

Gouverneur Morris. By THEODORE ROOSEVELT. American Statesmen Series. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston and New York, 1888. — 370 pp.

Martin Van Buren. By EDWARD M. SHEPARD. American Statesmen Series. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston and New York, 1888. — 404 pp.

Gouverneur Morris represented much that was best in the revolutionary era, and his life is well worthy of a place in this series. Wealth and social position opened for him the way to a political career. He belonged to one of those great families which from early colonial times had controlled the politics of New York and given to them a peculiar aristocratic character. In order to join the revolutionary party, Morris was forced to break many of the ties of family and friendship. Some of his nearest relatives cast in their lot with the Tory party of the state. The account given by Mr. Roosevelt leads us to infer that Morris hesitated for a time. His tastes and surroundings inclined him toward aristocracy. He was not an admirer of democracy; was in no sense a demagogue; did not believe in the inherent wisdom of the masses. He had no sympathy with the doctrine of natural rights, which was adopted by so many of the revolutionary leaders. Practical considerations, then, rather than theories of government; the conviction, gradually formed, that independence had come by the natural process of development to be a necessity, led Morris to decide in favor of revolt. He and John Jay acted in the matter strictly like Anglo-Saxons, and not at all like Frenchmen. Had all our public men at the time acted in the same way and from the same motives, the sweeping statements usually made in the histories about the good sense shown throughout the movement would be true. But unfortunately they are an exaggeration.

The most valuable service rendered by Morris to his state after the outbreak of the revolution was in the convention which drew up the constitution of 1777. It is to his credit that he opposed the provisions for the establishment both of the council of appointment and the council of revision. But they were adopted, and in connection with the former the "spoils system" was introduced into New York politics. In the Continental Congress, during 1778 and 1779, Morris uniformly supported the plans and efforts of Washington, and opposed the particularistic policy

advocated by Samuel Adams. In the last years of the war he devoted himself to the study of the finances, and urged the adoption of an adequate system of taxation, instead of the continued resort to paper money. The essays which he published on the subject won for him from Robert Morris an appointment as Assistant Financier. While in this office he made public a plan for the issue of decimal coinage, which, when modified by Jefferson, became the basis of our present monetary system.

When the revolutionary struggle was successfully ended, Morris was among the first to see the need of national union. His strong will and ardent temperament, his love for direct, straightforward methods, his knowledge of the difficulties which Washington had been forced to contend with, and above all his practical experience in the department of finance, where centred all the elements of weakness, taught him that the confederation must soon pass away. But he did not for a moment believe that the states would separate; he saw that they were bound to unite. "If persuasion would not unite the country, then the sword would." He was a leader in that small band of men within the Convention of 1787 who came there to represent, not a state, but the country. While many of the revolutionary leaders in their excessive love for local and individual freedom seem to have forgotten entirely the prospect of national unity which dawned upon them in 1776, Morris was ready to go to the other extreme. The flight of his thought was wholly above and beyond state lines. He was ready for the sake of unity to see them almost obliterated. He believed that "state attachments and state importance had been the bane of the country." Not only did he advocate proportional representation in both houses of Congress, but that that body should be empowered to repeal any state statute and legislate directly in all cases of conflict between state laws. He favored a strong national executive and judiciary. Barring two or three erratic notions, like his jealousy of the West, and also a certain excessive tendency toward centralization, not justified by later events, every student of the *Madison Papers* must confess that the services of Gouverneur Morris in the Constitutional Convention were second to none, except those of Madison.

With the adoption of the constitution the most important part of Morris's career ended. With his work as an observer and critic of the French revolution, able and just though it was, we are not concerned. In 1799 he returned to America and the year following was elected to the United States Senate. During his term of service there, and throughout the rest of his life, he naturally acted with the Federalist party. He however supported Jefferson in the purchase of Louisiana. But when embargo and war with England were resorted to by the dominant party, Morris sympathized fully with the extreme New England

Federalists in their plans of secession, and with them incurred the suspicion of treasonable intent.

Thus we have in Morris a typical Federalist of the early period of our history. His views in their sources and character were the views of his party. His life kept pace with its development and closed at the time when the party collapsed. Mr. Roosevelt has related the history of his career in a plain direct manner, and was evidently in sympathy with his subject.

Van Buren was a man quite different from Morris, and his life is written from a different standpoint. Mr. Shepard's is one of the most scholarly productions which has appeared in the series. He has been diligent in the collection of material and clear in the construction of his argument. For his book, though a biography, is an argument from beginning to end. Unlike the preceding volumes of the series, it is written with a Democratic bias, and is an attempt to rescue Van Buren's character and reputation from the charges which have been made against them. Hammond accused him of being non-committal. Von Holst¹ has called him the "first politician-president," and described him as a man whose talents did not rise to the rank of statesmanship, who possessed much experience and skill in political intrigue, and who was governed in action by motives of expediency rather than by principle. "The propelling forces in him were never moral powers which he served for their own sake." "From the very first to the last, he remained in that characterless middle, in the shallow stagnant water of trading politics." To the German historian he is simply the first of American wirepullers, whose fortunes on the stage of national politics were made by Andrew Jackson. Mr. Shepard's object is to show that this view is erroneous, that it is not supported by the facts of history or the utterances of Van Buren himself; in short, that it is worthy only of a place in John Quincy Adams' *Diary*.

Mr. Shepard claims, in the first place, that the influence of Jefferson over the mind of Van Buren was very strong from the outset. In the Democratic school he received his training, and from it he never departed. He became, in fact, the second great expounder of its doctrines. Instead of being non-committal, he is shown to have declared his political faith with sufficient boldness and consistency on all important occasions. Mr. Shepard even goes so far as to maintain that Van Buren formulated the doctrines which Jackson defended before the country, and so is to be regarded as the founder of the Democratic party in its modern form. If this be true, what is usually regarded as the authoritative view of our political history between 1820 and 1840

¹ *Verfassung und Demokratie*, II, 142 ff.

must be abandoned or seriously modified. The standpoint of Benton must be chosen as the correct one rather than that occupied by the statesmen who organized the Whig party.

Mr. Shepard shows how Van Buren received his training and passed through the earlier stages of his political career amid the party conflicts of New York. He led the Bucktails in a long series of struggles with the Clintonians, when the only question at issue was the possession of the offices. He adopted fully the political methods of the time and place, and became very skilful as a party leader. The doctrine of strict party allegiance and the employment of sharp campaign tactics he carried with him into national politics. Mr. Shepard does not attempt to defend him against the charge of heavy responsibility for the adoption of the "spoils system" during Jackson's administration, but claims that he should not be judged by standards which have been adopted since his time. The sufficient answer to this would seem to be that outside of New York the standard of public action as to removals and appointments had already been set as high as it has ever been since. The proof of this is to be found in the utterances and practices of the earlier Presidents. Why should John Quincy Adams live up to one standard, which all must agree to have been the only true one, and Van Buren be judged by one very much lower? Van Buren seems to have deliberately chosen the lower, the unstatesmanlike course of policy in this matter.

Mr. Shepard argues further, that with the accession of J. Q. Adams to the presidency an elaborate attempt was made by him and Clay to enlarge the functions of the national government, and that to a dangerous extent. This called for a reassertion of true democratic doctrine, and Van Buren from his seat in the Senate became its leading advocate. He also used the skill he had acquired in New York for the organization of a new party of opposition. He then, with Jackson, led in this second revival of democracy, as Jefferson had done in the first. This again is essentially Benton's view, though Jackson, not Van Buren, is his hero.

It is claimed by the author that between 1824 and 1828 Van Buren opposed Adams's schemes of internal improvements and of the Panama mission from high political considerations, as likely to lead to dangerous governmental encroachment and corruption. At the same time, like an able tactician, he was making all possible use of the alleged "bargain" between Adams and Clay, and was laboring to convince the people that their will had been wrongfully thwarted thereby. He spread and enforced by all means in his power the dogma of absolute majority rule, and a careful limitation of the sphere of government. Mr. Shepard believes that the issues involved in the election of 1828 were very grave

ones. Had Adams been re-elected, he considers it probable that the government would have become involved in a complicated system of internal improvements which would have seriously changed its character.

The election of Jackson introduced Van Buren into the race for the presidency. The breach between the President and Calhoun removed his only formidable rival within the Democratic party. The arbitrary rejection by the Senate of his appointment as minister to England helped him into the vice-presidency in 1832. Though at first opposed to the removal of the deposits from the United States Bank, he quickly yielded to the arguments of Kendall and fell into line with the other supporters of the President in his crusade against that institution. During his candidacy in 1836 he skilfully avoided a break with the slave power by declaring himself opposed to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

Van Buren appears to the best advantage when, in the first year of his presidency, the country was overtaken by the crisis of 1837. He then bore with his customary patience the abuse that was heaped upon him, and manfully refused to yield to the demands for government aid. He had gained much through his connection with Jackson, but then he had to bear the results of the ex-President's errors. That the crisis of 1837 was to a considerable extent promoted by the financial experiments of Jackson's last administration cannot be doubted. Its chief political effect was the defeat of Van Buren in 1840, and the temporary establishment of the Whigs in power.

Once again, in 1844, Van Buren showed by his letter in opposition to the annexation of Texas that he was capable of subordinating personal advantage to principle. Through this he lost a second presidential term. But, after all, the rank which one assigns to Van Buren and those associated with him among our public men must depend upon his opinion of the issues involved in the elections of 1824 and 1828. Did J. Q. Adams propose anything new even in the councils of the Democratic party? An examination of the utterances of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Calhoun, will, I think, show that he did not. If that is true, the opposition to him was factious and based on motives to which the true statesman will never descend. A flood of light is thrown on the events of the time by the history of Jackson's struggle with the Bank previous to 1832. That, however, Mr. Shepard ignores. This book contains the best statement of the Democratic side of the question yet made, but it still remains true that the Democratic leaders in the time of Jackson were chiefly distinguished for skill in the arts of partisanship. Van Buren was simply the most respectable among them.

H. L. OSGOOD.